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INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS

VOL. X



No. 6

A SERIES OF PUBLICA-
TIONS RELATING TO THE
AMERICAN ABORIGINES

AN ARCHAIC IOWA TOMAHAWK

BY
M. R. HARRINGTON

NEW YORK
MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
HEYE FOUNDATION

1920

Publications of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation

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THIS series of INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS is devoted primarily to the publication of the results of studies by members of the staff of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, and is uniform with HISPANIC NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS, published by the Hispanic Society of America, with which organization this Museum is in cordial coöperation.

AN ARCHAIC IOWA
TOMAHAWK

BY

M. R. HARRINGTON





AN ARCHAIC IOWA TOMA- HAWK

BY M. R. HARRINGTON



THIS remarkable old war-hatchet from the Iowa Indians of Oklahoma is not only unique in the collections of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, as there is nothing like it from any tribe, but it is also especially interesting because the primitive method by which its slender, iron, celt-like blade is attached to its handle takes us back to the days before the tomahawk, as we now know it, had ever been seen in America, and suggests a hitherto unsuspected method of hafting, for actual use, the long, slender, prehistoric copper celts often found in the Mississippi valley and the Gulf States—celts usually called “ceremonial.”¹

The handle of this implement, which resembles closely that of many "ball-headed" war-clubs, is $19\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, made of some hard, fine-grained wood resembling maple, is rather flat, and tapers, gradually increasing in width from the pointed proximal end (near which is a hole for a wrist thong), to the distal end, where it makes a sharp curve, but instead of expanding into a ball at this point like a war-club, it continues at a right angle for about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, only slightly broader and thicker, and is there cut squarely across. On the outside of this curved part is carved in the round the figure of an otter, its head projecting beyond the square-cut end, its eyes made of little hollow cylinders of copper driven into the wood, its four legs embracing the thickened portion and its tail extending back along the handle proper. The iron blade, $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide at the bit and $\frac{5}{8}$ inch at the poll, penetrates the thickened portion from end to end, entering just below the otter's chin and emerging from the base of its tail. It is embellished with hammered dents forming wide, shallow notches along

both edges, and is provided with a notched projection at the tip of the poll and a perforation nearer the handle, both perhaps intended for the suspension of feathers or other ornaments or symbols. The whole weapon shows the wear and polish of long handling, and seems to have been painted with aboriginal pigments in two colors at different times, the first being a dark brown, almost black, showing only where the second, a dull red, is worn away. In places the pigment remaining has the caked appearance of dried blood.

The tomahawk was found tied to the outside of an old war-bundle, or *warúxawe*, containing various charms and medicines used in battle, when purchased from Frank Kent, an Iowa Indian. He said it had at one time been the property of his wife's father, chief Ben Holloway, from whose ancestors it had descended for a number of generations. Little detailed information concerning the bundle or the tomahawk was remembered, but it is probable that the otter was the "dream helper" of the original maker of the bundle—the animal

that had appeared to him when he fasted for power as a youth, and that he carved it in the handle of his war-hatchet to acquire for himself the otter's power of swift attack, as well as the benefit of its mystical connection with the "Medicine Dance."² The otter was placed on the handle, the maker probably told his friends, in such a position that it could "see" the wound made in the enemy's skull, and could also drink his blood.

NOTES

1. MOORE, Clarence B., Aboriginal Sites on Tennessee River, *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, vol. XVI, pp. 403-404, Phila., 1915. MOORE, Certain Aboriginal Remains of the Black Warrior River, *ibid.*, vol. XIII, pp. 152, 153, 162, 174, Phila., 1905.

2. SKINNER, Alanson, Medicine Ceremonies of the Menomini, Iowa, etc., *Indian Notes and Monographs*, vol. IV, Mus. Amer. Ind., Heye Found., New York, 1920. (In press.)

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EDITED BY F. W. HODGE

VOL X



No. 7

A SERIES OF PUBLICA-
TIONS RELATING TO THE
AMERICAN ABORIGINES

A WOODEN IMAGE FROM KENTUCKY

BY

GEORGE H. PEPPER

NEW YORK
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HEYE FOUNDATION

1921

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